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DIEGUEÑO MORTUARY OLLAS

By CONSTANCE GODDARD DuBOIS

For years I have pursued the search for a mortuary olla among the Diegueño Indians of southern California, and, like a will-o'-the-wisp, it has allured only to escape me. The Indians all knew of these burial jars, and the whereabouts of some were known to the initiated ; but to meddle with them was sacrilege.

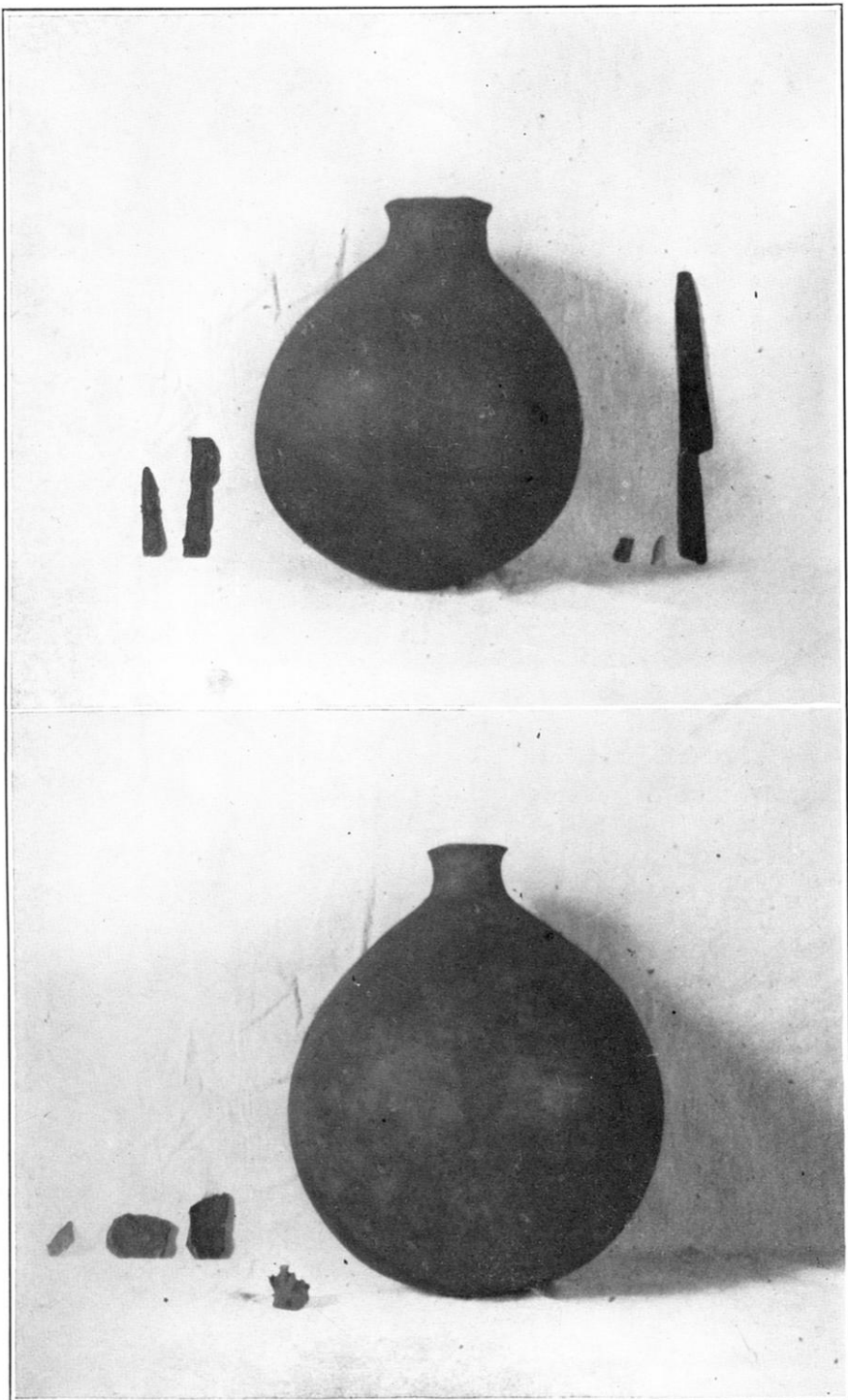
An educated Indian girl who still shared the feelings of her people wept when it was suggested that her grandfather should secure one for my benefit. It was represented to her that it was to be used for the benefit of science and not to satisfy an idle curiosity ; that those thus buried were so long forgotten that it was not like disturbing the remembered dead. But the casuistry availed little, and she was happy when the search proved futile.

At last, through the efforts of a friend, an aged Indian was induced to disclose the secret locality where the burial had been made ; and guided by his directions another old Indian undertook the search. Not daring to pursue the adventure alone, he induced a friend to accompany him ; the latter, caring little for the old religion, had in fact been for years enlisted in the quest for the mortuary olla, but hitherto in vain.

Following the directions of their guide, the two reached the distant cañon in the mountains, searched among the fallen granite rocks, most often the spot selected for a cache, and digging here they found two burial jars, or ollas, intact and perfect.

I have them now before me (see plate xxix). The stones which had covered the narrow mouths of these receptacles had been displaced by the pushing roots of brushwood, and the earth had gradually silted in, partly filling the jars and mingling with their contents. Part of this earth may have freshly fallen in at the time of discovery.

The two jars appear to be of different periods of manufacture,



DIEGUEÑO BURIAL OLLAS

Upper figure: Burial olla showing broken arrowheads and rusted case-knives found within it.

Lower figure: Ancient burial olla showing fragments of skull and piece of the jawbone still retaining a tooth.

of independent make, and to have been buried at different times. It is probable that this place was used, as our cemeteries are, for successive burials, side by side, or in adjacent spots.

The jar of latest period is of the sort of pottery still made among the Diegueños. Its texture, quality, and surface are not unlike the vessels now to be seen as household utensils, some old, some new, occurring as far south as Manzanita. It can not be less than sixty years old, and is probably much older. The priests forbade the burning of the dead, but it was secretly practised among the mountain Indians within the memory of some of the oldest men, say within a period of sixty or seventy years.

This jar is about 11 inches high, 29 inches in circumference, and 3 inches across the mouth, weighing four pounds. It is not symmetrical enough in shape to maintain a correctly upright position on its rounded base.

It contains, mingled with the intruding earth, bits of bone and charcoal; some broken arrowheads; bits of stone fallen in from above; and two old case-knives eaten by rust, one broken quite in two. The knives were probably procured at the Missions, very likely manufactured there; and may have been buried with the ashes of the dead for ceremonial reasons, possibly having first been thrown upon the pyre with other valued household possessions and burned with the dead.

The knives were made in one solid piece of iron or copper, in a curious antique shape. The olla is evidently not prehistoric, but is probably a hundred or a hundred and twenty years old.

The other jar appears to be of greater age. Its shape and general appearance are different, its outlines more symmetrical, the mouth narrower. The ware is of different surface, weathered by time. It is about as thick as a gourd, worn on the base to the thinness of cardboard, a clean cut here showing a hole as if lately pierced by a knife. It seems yellowed by age. It is of fairly symmetrical shape, 13 inches high, 32 inches in circumference, and two inches across the mouth, weighing three pounds.

Mingled with the earth which had fallen into it were many fragments of bone of comparatively large size, as large as could be made to pass through the mouth of the jar. These included frag-

ments of a skull ; a piece of the jaw-bone with one tooth still in place ; many smaller bits of bone ; fragments of charcoal ; a perfect arrowhead showing evidence of having been in the fire. The ashes in both jars are mingled too closely with earth to be easily detected.

The Diegueños learned their ceremonial religion from the Luiseños ; but their habit of urn-burial they must have brought with them from an earlier home, no trace of these jars being found among the Luiseños. Both tribes burned and then buried their dead ; but with the Luiseños it was the custom to dig a shallow grave, building over it the funeral pyre ; and when the remains were consumed the ashes were buried in the same spot ; while the Diegueños, as has been said, collected the ashes with the unconsumed bones, placed them in pottery jars, and buried them in secret places known only to a few.

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